

CHAPTER 3 Transportation Element

Section 3.1 Introduction

Movement of people, goods, and services within and through the Town is an integral part of everyday life for the citizens of Amherst. Decisions made regarding transportation can have a direct impact on the community's growth and quality of life. These decisions should be made to include choices that will most effectively serve the community as a whole, maximize investment in transportation infrastructure, as well as minimize conflicts between modes of transportation as well as jurisdictions.

This chapter will assess the current inventory of transportation options, list goals, objectives, and policies that guide future development of various modes of transportation in the Town of Amherst, and compare local goals to existing county, regional, and state transportation plans.

Section 3.2 Transportation Facility Inventory

A. Roads and Highways

Classifying and protecting roads according to their function is a primary element of transportation planning. The term "functional classification" is used to refer to the process by which highways are grouped into classes, according to the character of service they are intended to provide. The level of service a roadway provides can range from a high degree of traffic mobility to a more basic land access function, or a combination of both (Map 3.1). All roads and highways have been classified as part of the County's Functional Classification Plan, adopted by the County Board in 1989. Criteria used in determining functional classification included traffic volumes (Average Daily Traffic volume), land use, population concentrations, and geographical limitations such as river crossings or restrictive topography.

As of 2004, prior to the completion of the Highway 10 bypass, the local road system within the Town of Amherst consisted of a total of 91.9 miles of public roadway. US Highway 10 accounted for 6.5 miles of the network, State Highway 161 comprised 3.2 miles, and County Roads (Cty Rds) A, B, SS, K, and Q totaled 31.6 miles. Local Town roads accounted for the final 50.6 miles.

Principal Arterials - primarily stress traffic mobility/movement and are representative of interstate or intrastate travel. USH 10 is the only principal arterial in the Town of Amherst. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) regulates public and private road and driveway access onto this facility. The 2002 ADT count for USH 10, east of the Village of Amherst was 8,900 vehicles.

Minor Arterials - provide for intraregional and interarea traffic movements. STH 161 is the only minor arterial in the Town. Road and driveway access onto STH 161 is regulated by WisDOT and Portage County. The 2002 ADT count near County Rd. T was 3,400 vehicles while the count near County Rd. ZZ was 1,900.

Major Collectors - provide for interarea traffic movements. Major collectors in the Town of Amherst include County Road's A, B, and SS (west of Nelsonville). The location and separation of access points along these highways is regulated by Portage County. The required minimum separation between access points is 300 feet. The 2002 ADT count for Cty Rd A was 420 vehicles south of STH 161 and 1,100 vehicles south of STH 10. Cty Rd B had an ADT count of 3,000 vehicles west of the new USH 10 alignment and 3,100 east of the new alignment.

Minor Collectors – These roads link the rural areas, i.e. local roads, with higher order roads/highways. Portage County regulates the location and separation of new access points along these roadways and requires a minimum separation of 300 feet between access points. Minor collectors in the Town of Amherst include Cty Rds K (south of USH 10) and Q, as well as Loberg Road. The 2002 ADT count for Cty Rd K (south of USH 10) was 320 vehicles, while Cty Rd Q had a count of 510 vehicles.

Local Roads - primarily stress land access and provide inter-ownership and intra-ownership traffic movements over short distances. All roads not designated as arterials or collectors are considered local roads. The Town regulates the location of new access points on local roads and Portage County requires that access points be located a minimum of 50 feet from a County Road intersection.

B. Transit and Transportation Facilities for the Disabled and Elderly

The Portage County Department on Aging provides transportation services for transit-dependent adults and people with disabilities to the Amherst area through a busing and volunteer escort service. Bus rides are provided to meal sites, grocery shopping, senior center services, essential personal business, and adult day care. Buses will bring residents into Stevens Point or to the Jensen Center on specific days during the week. Volunteer drivers may also be requested for those persons going to medical appointments or those otherwise not able to use the busing service. Persons requiring such services must call to make a reservation and are picked up and dropped off at their home. There is no set fee for this service; however, passengers are asked to make a donation. For more detailed information contact the Department on Aging at **824-2458**.

Community Industries Corporation of Stevens Point employs handicapped individuals to perform various activities important to the local community. This organization does offer rides to work for its employees who have no other means of transportation.

C. Bicycle/Walking Routes and Trails

The Town of Amherst has two major bicycle/walking trails running through it. The Tomorrow River State Trail follows an abandoned rail line from the Village of Plover in Portage County to the Village of Scandinavia in Waupaca County. The trail is open to bicyclists, joggers, and hikers in the spring, summer, and fall, and to skiers, snowmobilers, and dog sledgers in the winter. A separate trail for horseback riders is located adjacent to the limestone bike path from the Village of Plover to the Village of Amherst Junction. Parking and access to the trail is available in the Village of Amherst Junction and at Cate Park, approximately one half mile north of the Village of Amherst. A paved shoulder has been installed along Pond Street, from Mill Street north to the Cate Park trail head, to provide safer pedestrian and bike access to the Tomorrow River State Trail.

The other major route is the designated bicycle route for the Ice Age Trail. The route follows the Tomorrow River State Trail out of the Town of Stockton to County Road Q in the Village of Amherst Junction. From there, the route goes south along Cty Rd Q to Packer Avenue; east on Packer Avenue to Cty Rd B; the route then follows Cty Rd B to Cty Rd T, then north into the Town of New Hope (Map 3.1).

At the time this plan was written, a number of routes had been proposed along the eastern portion of the Town for inclusion into the walking corridor of the National Ice Age Trail. The Town may wish to acknowledge these routes, when finalized, in future plan updates.

Map 3.1 Transportation Networks and Functional Class

D. Railroads

Eight miles of mainline track lay across the Town of Amherst. There are three (3) public at-grade crossings and three bridges/trestles. WisDOT does plan to close the at-grade crossing located at Five Corners as part of the future ramp construction at Lake Road.

Canadian National Railroad runs approximately 22-24 trains per day through the Town of Amherst. There is an expected 10-15% increase over the next 10 years, including a 60 mph corridor and possible increases in track sidings.

E. Air Transportation

A number of airports serve the Town of Amherst: the Central Wisconsin Airport, the Stevens Point Municipal Airport, and the Waupaca Municipal Airport. Two private airstrips are also located within the Town of Amherst.

The Central Wisconsin Airport, located approximately 35 miles north of Amherst along Interstate Hwy 39 in Mosinee, is a full service, all-weather airport offering around-the-clock service. Several airlines offer regular commuter and passenger service with connections anywhere in the world. Air cargo service is also available with overnight delivery.

The Stevens Point Municipal Airport is located at the intersection of I-39 and STH 66 in Stevens Point (15 miles east of the Town) and has two runways, one of which is 6,000 feet long. There are 37 private hangers at the airport. These accommodate corporate jets (i.e. Noel Group and Sentry Insurance) and private aircraft. No passenger or freight service is available. Jet fuel is available for private aircraft (100 octane low-lead), but there are no repair services.

The Waupaca Municipal Airport is located 13 miles east of Amherst on USH 10 and has two runways. The airport is open to the public; however, there is no passenger service available.

F. Trucking

There are no designated truck routes within Town of Amherst. Semi traffic in the Town generally consists of through traffic on U.S. Highway 10 and County Rd. B; local traffic on Cty Rd KK and AB; and normal delivery services for area businesses. The Portage County Highway Department posts weight limits on county roads in spring to mitigate potential damage from the thawing frost layer in the soil. However, County Road B from the Village of Plover to the Village of Amherst is one route that is not posted in spring.

Several trucking firms providing local, regional, and national service are based in the Town and are located primarily along major collector roads.

G. Water Transportation

Although the Tomorrow River runs through the Town, its primary use is recreation and isn't considered a transportation corridor.

Section 3.3 Inventory and Analysis of Applicable Transportation Plans and Programs

A. WisDOT Six-Year Highway Improvement Plan

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) will be constructing a new US Highway 10 by-pass around the City of Stevens Point. This will widen the highway from a two lane into a multi-lane divided highway.

The proposed Stevens Point bypass for USH 10, originally planned to be finished within this 20-year planning period, is on hold due to lack of available funding at the State DOT level. Funding will need to be obtained throughout the Transportation Projects Commission (TPC) process while competing with other projects throughout the state. The bypass project is now scheduled to proceed beyond the planning period for this document. In the interim, WisDOT will use approximately \$20 million of previously authorized funding to upgrade the existing 2-lane route between Cty Rd J interchange and Amherst Junction to a 4-lane divided expressway. Road intersections will be at-grade, and turning lanes provided at most intersections. Some existing driveways will be closed, with alternative access to USH 10 being provided to those locations. The construction of the ramps at Lake Road may affect traffic flow within the Town.

1. Jurisdictional Transfers

With the reconstruction of USH 10 around the Village of Amherst to a 4-lane divided highway and its subsequent relocation (Map 3.1), numerous jurisdictional transfers will occur, resulting in changes to the functional classification of certain segments and traffic flow through the Town of Amherst.

A majority of the USH 10 Amherst by-pass, which opened in the fall of 2004, is located almost entirely in the Town of Amherst. There is an interchange at Cty Rd B west of the Village of Amherst that will provide access to the 4-lane highway for area residents. Cty Rd B will be rerouted around the Village of Amherst along the new USH 10 alignment to another new interchange at Cty Rd A, where a new County Road will be constructed northeast towards Edge Road. The existing Cty Rd A route was terminated in a cul-de-sac on the north side of the new interchange, and will be rerouted along with Cty Rd B towards Edge Road, and then along Cty Rd T towards Highway 161. New USH 10 realigns with the existing USH 10 just east of County Road A.

A number of jurisdictional transfers will directly affect the Town of Amherst. The former US Highway 10 from Lake Drive south to Cty Rd A has been transferred from the State to Portage County and renamed Cty Rd KK. Cty Rd A from Highway 161 south to the Village of Amherst boundary line, and Cty Rd B from the new USH 10 interchange east to the Village of Amherst boundary line will be transferred from the County to Town of Amherst.

State Highway 161 from County Road KK (formerly USH 10) to the Village of Nelsonville's northern limits will be transferred from the State to the County and will be renamed Cty Rd Q. State Highway 161 will be rerouted along the northern Village border along Loberg Road and Cty Rd SS eventually intersecting with the new USH 10. A new intersection will be constructed at the junction of Cty Rd ZZ, Highway 161, and the new Cty Rd Q to allow for a safer crossing of the new State Highway 161. Traffic counts will have to be done once the realignment project is complete to determine the new functional classifications.

B. Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2020

The State Airport Plan determines the number, location and type of aviation facilities required to adequately serve the state's aviation needs through 2020. The plan also forecasts the level of public investment required to: upgrade substandard features such as widening of existing runways, replace existing systems to meet Federal and State standards, and enhance the airport system through runway extension and new construction. The classifications for Central Wisconsin Airport (Air Carrier/Air Cargo) and Stevens Point Municipal Airport (Transport/Corporate) are not projected to change through 2020.

C. State Railroad Plans

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) has decided to include the State Rail Plan as a component of the State's Connections 2030 Plan, a long range, all-mode transportation plan. At the time the Amherst Comprehensive Plan was written, the state had only completed the Issues and Opportunities Report of the rail plan. The primary issues in the report were broken into four major areas: rail network issues, intercity passenger rail issues, safety issues, and legislative issues. Emerging issues identified in the report included commuter rail, locomotive horns at rail/road crossings, and proposals to reduce mercury emissions. Specific goals and policies have not yet been identified in the State's Rail Plan; however, Town officials should maintain awareness of the status of that Plan as there is a rail corridor that parallels USH 10 through most of the Town.

D. State, Regional and Local Bicycle and Trail Plans

Wisconsin Bicycle Transportation Plan 2020

Overall plan goals are: to increase the level of bicycling in Wisconsin and to reduce the number of crashes involving bicycle and motor vehicles.

Local Bicycle and Trail Plans

Current plans exist for a bridge across Cty Rd KK to allow for the unencumbered continuation of the Tomorrow River State Trail.

Section 3.4 Transportation Related Programs

The Town of Amherst uses the PASER (Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating) road condition rating system to assess the physical condition of local roads. The PASER software can help prioritize road maintenance, calculate project costs, evaluate consequences of alternative budgets and project selection strategies.

The Town tries to make effective use of the State's Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP), a reimbursement program that pays up to 50% of eligible costs for upgrading seriously deteriorating town roads.

Section 3.5 Transportation Issues

The following transportation issues were identified during this planning process:

- The Highway 10 relocation will:
 - By-pass the village of Amherst and bisect the Village of Amherst Junction.
 - Adversely impact agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas of the Town.
 - Increase pressure to develop land for commercial and residential uses in the Town near the villages. This growth pressure must be managed carefully.
- The Highway 10 relocation may:
 - Require additional setbacks from the new right-of-way to ensure there is room for additional lanes in the future if needed.
 - Change local road traffic patterns, thus requiring upgrades to roads that were not previously planned for upgrade.
 - Change the demographics of the area.
 - Create useless parcel fragments that nobody wants.
- How will re-assigning of road systems impact traffic patterns?

- How can communities band together to secure highway funds for specific projects?
- How will the Town create a safe environment for different modes of transportation?
- How can the Town address potential safety issues arising from railroad spills or derailments?
- How will road infrastructure be addressed due to increased growth?
- How will the negative impacts of signs and billboards throughout the Town be addressed?
- How will the Town address the increased use of compression brakes by trucks?
- How will the Town address the potential impacts from hazardous material spills along rail and road corridors?
- How can surface waters and Lake Emily be protected from transportation projects?

Section 3.6 Transportation Goals, Objectives and Policies

Goal 1: Maintain a safe and efficient transportation network throughout the Town.

Objective 1.1: Identify potential growth areas that may generate need for road construction or improvements.

Policies:

1. Recommend that future road right-of-way in new developments be identified on final plats.
2. Update the Town of Amherst road ordinance.
3. Work with local organizations to minimize conflicts and enhance safety along snowmobile, biking, and pedestrian trails.
4. Where necessary, request the County to post weight limits on County roads.
5. Identify roads where speed limits should be decreased and create ordinances to set and enforce limits.
6. Consider road impact fees for new developments for needed upgrading of roads adjacent to those developments.
7. Consider developing an official road map.
8. Consider the creation of an ‘engine braking’ ordinance.
9. Roads must be designed to accommodate school bus and snow removal equipment.
10. Work with County Emergency Management Department to develop a plan for dealing with hazardous materials spills.

Objective 1.2: Monitor changing traffic patterns due to jurisdictional road transfers.

Policy: Work with County Highway Dept and DOT to identify safety concerns, weight limits and road usage on re-assigned roads.

Objective 1.3: Materials, road construction practices, and road runoff should have a minimal impact on the environment.

Policy: Contact the DOT and/or County Highway Department to ensure that road construction materials are environmentally safe and proper stormwater management provisions are adhered to.

Objective 1.4: Identify potential railroad problem areas.

Policy: Work with railroad commission to enhance railroad safety in the Town.

Goal 2: Enhance the aesthetic development of the road right of ways.

Objective 2.1: Encourage local organizations to support highway beautification efforts.

Policy: Work with the County and other municipalities to apply for highway enhancement funds.

Objective 2.2: Limit off premise signage along major transportation corridors. (i.e. USH 10, STH 161, Cty Rds A, B, D, T, Q, K, KK)

Policy: Work with other municipalities to develop a sign ordinance that is consistent throughout the Town.

Goal 3: Minimize the negative impacts of the Highway 10 re-alignment project.

Objective 3.1: The upgrading of USH 10 to a four-lane expressway will present unforeseen consequences. The Town will strive for flexibility in administration of land use objectives and policies when addressing issues directly affected by the expressway routing.